

New York Theatre Critics' Reviews

1945

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Week of April 16, 1945

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Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

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"Star Spangled Family"

Play by B. Harrison Orkow; staging by William Castle; settings by Edward Gilbert; presented by Philip A. Waxman and Joseph Kipness at the Biltmore Theatre, April 10, 1945.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
April 11, 1945

"Star Spangled Family" No Aid to Play Season

By JOHN CHAPMAN

IT WAS, theatrically speaking, quite a day yesterday. In the afternoon the Critics' Circle bestowed a healthy vote upon "The Glass Menagerie" as the best play of the year, and in the evening a whatisit titled "Star Spangled Widow" was presented at the Biltmore Theatre. No more startling contrast could be sought, on the evidence of the only act of "Star Spangled Widow" that I saw. The first act.

Our official star-gazer, Marion Drew, warned in the morning paper that yesterday was the well-known "dark of the moon" period, during which one should not start new projects or wear new clothes or begin a journey. Just to make things clear Miss Drew advised, "This is not a very promising day, according to Astrology, and you would gain in the long run by delaying most actions until after tomorrow."

About a War Widow

Well, the critics went ahead and chose "The Glass Menagerie" despite Miss Drew's forebodings. They did not choose "Dark of the Moon," although this is a very nice production. Up to a late hour last night nobody had killed a critic, but the whole sorry lot may now be living on borrowed time.

Philip A. Waxman and Joseph Kipness, however, chose this dire day for starting a new project—the aforementioned "Star Spangled Family"—written by one B. Harrison Orkow. They would have gained in the long run by delaying their actions more than considerably, so far as the first act was concerned. This was a hunk of junk, and execrably played.

In the first act of "The Glass Menagerie" Eddie Dowling comes out and leans against a wall and starts to talk about his mother and sister. Some one sees mother and sister and begins to listen to them. They don't say anything important and nothing happens to them—but they seem real and that is why the Critics' Circle gave them the prize.

In the first act of "Star Spangled Family" everybody talked and I didn't believe anybody. Everybody stood around the stage, too, until I got tired of one actress showing her profile and one actor showing his teeth.

The story, set some time in the future, is about the widow of a great war hero and whether or not she should marry again on account of the public responsibility of being the widow of a war hero. It sounded like complete nonsense and it seemed to be doing its best to delay most actions until after tomorrow. I couldn't wait.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
April 11, 1945

An Early Grave Yawns for 'Star Spangled Family'

By BURTON RASCOE

THIS obituary for "The Star Spangled Family" shall be brief.

The play expired on the stage of the Biltmore at 9:30 last night, at the drop of the curtain on the first act. Rigor mortis set in almost immediately but was not completed until 11:15, the usual closing time for a three-act play.

More than a third of the audience, however, declined to exhibit any morbid curiosity about this aspect of somatology and departed elsewhere at the first sound of the death rattle.

The play, in theme, is essentially a one-acter. The late Willard Mack must have written at least two dozen slight variations on it and acted in them in vaudeville 20-odd years ago; and it was long a standard one-reeler in the old Essanay days. Viz:

THE CAST

Gwen Purchase	Dennie Moore
Messenger	Byron Griffith
Sally Jones	Frances Reid
Paul	Harlan Stone
Harold	Franklin Allen
Mervin Mitchell	Lewis Charles
Dr. Richard Morley	Edward Nugent
"Bud" Jones	Donald Devlin
Margaret Jones	Jean Adair
Harry Lupinsky	Stephen Morrow
Victor Gunther	Leon Charles
Glen	Jimmy Sommer
Nurse Craig	Mary Best
Dr. Newton	Bram Nossen

An Old, Old Theme

A widow wants to marry again after a suitable period of mourning and she is in love with a fine man, who loves her. But there is a child; and the child remembers his daddy and doesn't want this strange man kissing his mother. Problem: How to win the child to acceptance of the step-father so all three will be happy. . . . The author of "Star Spangled Family" tries to give the melodrama an artificial pertinence, and succeeds only in making it rather sickening by laying the scene after the present war and making the first husband a war hero who won the DSM posthumously. Also to pad out the story he drags in the silver-chord theme, making the hero's mother warp the mind of the grandson instead of the son.

Over After First Act

The author, B. Harrison Orkow, is so inept he didn't realize he had not only presented his theme, but his solution of it in the first act; that his show was over when the first curtain went down. And for rhetorical monstrosities of dialogue you have rarely seen anything to beat Mr. Orkow's.

The staging, by William Castle, belongs to the era of "Orphans of the Storm." The veteran Jean Adair and the kid, Donald Devlin, were the only ones who escaped (and they didn't entirely) the general ineptitude of Mr. Castle's direction; Frances Reid was made to appear melodramatically ridiculous, with tremolo effects for her every utterance, no matter how commonplace.

Requiescat in pace.

NEW YORK SUN
April 11, 1945

"Star Spangled Family," Heavy-handed Play, Presented at the Biltmore

By WARD MOREHOUSE

B. HARRISON ORKOW, a Hollywood writer, looks into the future, setting the time of his play "during the first year after we have won the war," in "Star Spangled Family," which is packed with sincerity and a lot of very clumsy writing. It was presented last night at the Biltmore by Philip A. Waxman and Joseph Kipness.

Mr. Orkow's story is concerned with the marriage of the attractive widow of a great hero of the war to a young doctor whose service in the Medical Corps didn't take him out of Fort Dix, N. J., and the effect of this marriage upon his 9-year-old son and her mother-in-law. Mr. Orkow had something of an idea in his postwar theme but in his dramatization of it he has turned out a striving and labored play.

In "Star Spangled Family" Sally Jones, four years after the death of the renowned Mac Jones, combat flyer, becomes the bride of Dr. Richard Morley and she foresees a problem as she does so. But she scarcely realized that her young son's obsession in the memory of his father would become such that a psychiatrist would have to be called in, and that her mother-in-law, who went all-out in her efforts to encourage the boy's hostility to the new doctor-husband, would get so out of hand that she would have to be hustled off to a hospital.

The author presents his solution at the finish but it is by no means a convincing one.

There is a great deal of "Star Spangled Family" that is talky and tiresome and it is a play in which the acting is no more than tolerable. The evening's best performance is that of Frances Reid, who gives a skillful portrayal of the role of the harassed mother.

Edward Nugent does what he can as the new father, trying to win the heart of a brat. Donald Devlin is the boy who can't adjust himself to his mother's remarriage and who gets into tantrums—and into the hair of the audience. Jean Adair is the memory-worshipping mother-in-law, who can be quite venomous in her own way. Dennie Moore, who has so frequently overcome inferior material, tries to bring some comedy into a part into which none has been written.

In "Star Spangled Family" Mr. Orkow has written a heavy-handed play.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
April 11, 1945

"Star Spangled Family" Opens at Biltmore

By ROBERT GARLAND

PHILIP A. WAXMAN and Joseph Kipness finally got around to exposing their "Star Spangled Family" last night at the Biltmore Theatre. A chap called B. Harrison Orkow wrote it, a chap called William Castle staged it and a chap called Edward Gilbert designed the setting. Lou Eleise supervised the costumes.

"Star Spangled Family" poses a postwar problem. At the same time, the author calls it "a tender comedy." Well, maybe he's right and maybe he's wrong. I think he's wrong. The only comics I saw last night at the Biltmore were a couple of female taxi drivers, and they were, if I may say so, anything but tender.

But let's look backward. The action—if any—"Star Spangled Family" takes place a year or so after this war is over. Sally Jones, a widow of one of the war's greatest heroes, wants to remarry. For four years she has been without a husband. But her jealous mother-in-law resents her so-called "disloyalty" to her hero son.

Bud Does It

She—the Sally Jones who, at the Biltmore, is Frances Reid—does a good job of poisoning young Bud Jones's mind against his mother and his new step-father. The youngster's resentment of Dr. Richard Morley—played by Edward Nugent—in his father's place finally produces a screaming tantrum and a mental sickness.

If I may come right out and say so, the way Dr. Morley cures Bud is on the phoney side. When the lad starts talking to his father's portrait, Morley—still played by Mr. Nugent—gives Bud a lecture from off stage, pretending that he is Jones doing the speaking. Mother-in-law Jones is put out of the way via a strong sedative and a weak hospital.

Bud, Sally's nine-year-old offspring, has had an overpowering hero-worship built up in his mind. His grandmother has seen to that. It is she who resents the fact that Sally has fallen in love with another man. The balance of the play has to do with the weaning of Bud from his worship of the dead to his consideration of the living.

No and Yes

There's a certain sort of tenderness in this play. It doesn't manage to put the play over, but, nevertheless, the tenderness is there. It stems from the performance of Edward Nugent as Dr. Richard Morley. According to the program, Mr. Nugent comes from five generations of actors. His grandparents were the flying Romelli's out of Barnum and Bailey.

Frances Reid halls, as they say, from Texas. Before she was cast as Sally Jones in last night's misdeed, she was called the brightest girl in high school. If you get around the outskirts, you may have seen her in Martha's Vineyard, Brooklyn and Maplewood. She's

"Star Spangled Family"—continued

married to Philip Bournsuf, good guy around "Winged Victory." Miss Reid has talent.

Jean Adair will be remembered as Aunt Martha in "Arsenic and Old Lace." As Margaret Jones in "Star Spangled Family" she has no such good opportunity. Dennie Moore stepped out of "The Seven Lively Arts" into this one. It was she who had that lovely tag-line in "The Pursuit of Happiness." You remember! There's something hot waiting for you in the kitchen.

There's nothing as good as that in "Star Spangled Family." I wish there was. To this one I'll say "no." Definitely!

NEW YORK TIMES
April 11, 1945

Hero's Son

By LEWIS NICHOLS

ONE OF the more bizarre mysteries of a strange spring is why "Star Spangled Family" decided to come to town after all, to brave this world after being told off in the other, which was Boston. To be sure, B. Harrison Orkwo, who wrote it, had an idea; he wondered what would be the effect on a war hero's family should his widow marry again. The author's chief point of approach is through an 8-year-old boy, caught between his memories of his father and the reality of a step-father, and that is legitimate, too. But Mr. Orkwo is no psychological playwright. His drama is old-fashioned, his language is studied and bathos runs like a wide black line through the play.

"Star Spangled Family" probably would take no prizes even were it well acted. To make matters worse, the players in the cast at the Biltmore carefully accent the wrong features, at one time last evening drawing down a weary murmur from the balcony. Donald Davlin is the 8-year-old, and he has been directed to play like no 8-year-old ever. Frances Reid is the widow and Edward Nugent is the stepfather. Dennie Moore is all right as the wise friend; Jean Adair gives a surprisingly lacri-

mose and overdone piece as the boy's grandmother. "Star Spangled Family" often is so bad as to be tasteless; the subject is such as to deserve decent treatment or none.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
April 11, 1945

A Very Feeble Post-War Play

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

THE theater's one offering this week turns out to be one too many. "Star Spangled Family," I'm afraid, is not for Broadway; and not despite its war angle—for 1945. For, despite the war angle, it really deals with one of the oldest problems that ever inspired a problem play; and deals with it in as dull, laborious and old-fashioned a style as you can imagine.

Jumping ahead to "the first year AFTER we have won the war," "Star Spangled Family" has to do with the remarriage of a war widow—and a very special war widow, for Sally Jones' dead husband has become a nationally known hero. But the problem involved has nothing to do with Sally's own readjustment; it centers in her little son who idolizes his father's memory and resents his stepfather. His own father's mother is on hand to nurse the resentment along until the situation becomes acute. Not too acute however; the final curtain descends on a once more happy home.

Whether plain or flag-draped, the problem of a second marriage that involves children by the first is an always real and serious one. But Mr. Orkwo, however much in earnest, has ruined every one of his chances to put "Star Spangled Family" across. The play is full of corny and hoary devices, of flat dialogue and of wasted motion. The only time it is not dull is when it is palpably melodramatic. The production, moreover, deals it a further blow. Mr. Castle's direction lacks pace and naturalness, and in general the acting is far from expert. The best performer is Frances Reid, who plays the remarried widow with competence and a likeable sincerity; but she can breathe very little life into a dead part, and the others can breathe even less.

NEW YORK POST
April 11, 1945

'Star Spangled Family' at Biltmore Recommended As a Gentle Soporific

By JAMES ARONSON

SHORTLY before 11 o'clock last night at the Biltmore, Grandma Jones, the old witch from No'th Ca'lina, was given a sedative by young Doc Morley, who probably wanted to feed her arsenic.

A few moments later, "Star Spangled Family" stirred fitfully for the last scene, but it was too late: the all-powerful sedative the playwright had sprinkled over the audience for two and a half acts had really gone to work. So, quietly in the darkened, dozing theatre, young Doc Morley picked up little Bud Jones who was awful weary, and carried him off to bed as the final curtain fell.

Living vs. The Dead

You really want to know what went on before that? Well, here's the gist of it. In the first year after victory, the widow of Mac Jones, a great and much publicized war hero, marries a young doctor who through no fault of his own spent the war "repairing hangovers" at Fort Dix. The hero's mother resents the marriage as an insult to her son's glory and poisons the mind of her 8-year-old grandson against his mother and stepfather. The problem: how to wean the child away from his worship of a memory and get him to accept the love of the living.

It sounds like a good idea for a play, and it is—but B. Harrison Orkwo didn't make live drama out of it. He turned out instead a plodding, pedestrian job, full of poor writing that sprouted a weedbed of clichés. A flock of characters are pulled in for some weak laughs, and only in the last scene was there anything approaching effective theatre.

At times the hero's memory took such a beating that the plot assumed the proportions of a conspiracy to wipe it out completely. I'm sure the author never intended it that way. Word has got around that the play had been

New York Theatre Critics' Reviews

Announces

1945 CRITICS' CIRCLE AWARD WINNERS

Best Play By An American Author

"The Glass Menagerie"

Best Play By A Foreign Author

NO AWARD MADE

Complete newspaper reviews of "The Glass Menagerie" appear on pages 234, 235, 236, 237 in your 1945 volume of

NEW YORK THEATRE CRITICS' REVIEWS

"Star Spangled Family"—continued

considerably worked on before it opened at the Biltmore, but what was needed was a new play. The cast tried hard, but there must have been some of that there sedative enveloping the stage too.

You don't find it in the cast listing, but the poor old door buzzer in Sally Jones' apartment deserves featured billing. It sure got a work-out last night. Every time the author got into a jam, buzz, buzz, buzz went the buzzer.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE

April 11, 1945

Fails to Sparkle

By OTIS L. GUERNSEY JR.

A POST-WAR problem is being discussed in soap-opera language at the Biltmore. "Star Spangled Family" recounts what happens to a war hero's widow when she remarries in the face of her child's devotion to his dead father. Fitous and timely though

this theme certainly must be, it is outlined in unevenly paced incidents and slow, labored dialogue in this new B. Harrison Orkwo script. Each character is constantly pleading his or her own case at the expense of dramatic reality, and the result is a work whose mood resembles that of the daily radio serials.

The opening passages of "Star Spangled Family" are a series of arguments between two persons on the stage. First it is the attractive widow and her roommate who present the exposition. Then a young doctor takes over and persuades the widow into betrothal with variations on that routine about two people having their own right to happiness. The arguments continue when the hero's elderly mother enters and objects to the new marriage, fighting it by influencing the widow's child against it. Since these verbal battles are fought with blunted and familiar conversational patterns, the play has very little force while they are being waged.

William Castle's direction of the script is disappointing. When the play finally gets

around to enacting a crisis or two, the high moments appear to be posed rather than performed. This is particularly noticeable when one of the play's characters arrives home after two years in a Jap prison camp, when a broadcast in honor of the dead hero is staged in the flag-wrapped family's home, or when the doctor's repeated attempts to make friends with his stepson end in disaster. Most of the time there is no action written into the script, and the direction lacks the inventiveness necessary to hold it on its feet.

The most believable performance is that of Jean Adair as the hero's mother who schemes to keep the unwilling ghost too much alive in the heart of her grandson. Dennis Moore and Lewis Charles work hard on the comedy relief. Otherwise, the constant obligate of complaint that runs through the characterizations defeats the purpose of the actors to bring them to life. Since they are forever talking around their situations, in words that shed much too little light on a most pressing problem, "Star Spangled Family" is merely an ineffective conversation piece.

"A Place of Our Own"

Play by Elliott Nugent; staging by Mr. Nugent; settings by Raymond Sovey; presented by John Golden, in association with Mr. Nugent and Robert Montgomery, at the Royale Theatre, April 2, 1945.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM

April 2, 1945

Nugent's 'Place of Our Own' Confusing, Yet Interesting

By BURTON RASCOE

IT IS THE rather trite contention of Elliott Nugent, author of "A Place of Our Own," which was presented at the Royale last night, that young married couples should look gift horses in the mouth and reject them, particularly when the gifts are made with the purpose of regulating the lives of the recipients. In other words, that married kids just starting out in the world shouldn't live with their in-laws, even to save money.

Charles Reddy (Robert Keith) in this play is a prominent manufacturer in Calais, Ohio, in 1919. He has not founded the business; his father did that; but his father has retired and he (the son) has carried on the enterprise very successfully.

He is a widow and has two daughters. He doesn't pay much attention to the younger one, who had been married early to a vague male who (apparently) deserted her (as who could blame him; she is such a dumb chick anyway). But he wants his elder daughter beside him always.

There is no hint of psychopathology here, as in "One-Man Show." It is just that Reddy wants a housekeeper, and his elder daughter is nominated.

The Gift Horse

His elder daughter falls in love with and marries a captain in the Rainbow Division of the last war. The boy had studied law before he enlisted in the army. But, after his experiences in the Argonne, and particularly after his experiences at Verdun as a military attaché of President Woodrow Wilson, he wanted to be a newspaperman to propagate Wilson's ideas for a League of Nations and world peace.

Reddy loathed Wilson, so what could be more devoutly diabolical than that he should not only invite his son-in-law and his daughter to live in his mansion with him but that he should also buy a local paper, lock-stock-and-barrel, and present it to the young aspiring newspaperman and his bride on their wedding day? In that way he would have the lad hooked, under his thumb, and in a position to ruin any of his plans for furthering Wilson's ideas.

If my remembrance of history doesn't fail me, there is something terribly wrong with the big scene in the second act, as Mr. Nugent has presented it. His young newspaper idealist is here conspiring with the big shots

THE CAST

Margie Johns	 Toni Favor
Pete Reis	 John Howes
Nancy Monroe	 Jeanne Cagney
Charles Reddy	 Robert Keith
Jesse Ward	 Seth Arnold
David Monroe	 John Archer
Sam Reddy	 J. C. Nugent
Mary Lorimer	 Mercedes McCambridge
Augusta	 Lotta Palfi
Henry Barfuss	 Jack Howard
Mike McGroarty	 Anthony Blair
Joe Kaplan	 Wolfe Barzell
Mrs. Brandt	 Helen Carew

of Calais—a banker, a wardheeler, a merchant, a big farmer and a representative of labor—all vote-getters—to line up Daugherty, Cox and Harding to support the League of Nations, when Pappa-in-law Reddy steps in and throws a monkey wrench into the works. It seems the young newspaper man (John Archer) had cinched the support of Daugherty and Harding (H) until his father-in-law ruined things. This doesn't make sense to me.

Holds Your Interest

So Mr. Archer runs off with Mercedes McCambridge, an unconventional modern young woman who smokes cigarettes and reads Nietzsche, whom Mr. Keith, in paternal regard for his daughter's happiness had thrown at his head; and they spend a night together in Cleveland, but Mr. Archer goes on from there to be with Woodrow Wilson when the President was vainly trying to win support for his peace policies in the West, only to return to his father-in-law with his wife, when Mr. Keith has solved his own psychosis by marrying his nurse, a very efficient housekeeper. Blessings all around.

A rather confusing little domestic drama; but it holds your interest, and has some very good acting in it.

NEW YORK SUN

April 3, 1945

'A Place of Our Own,' Done at the Royale, Cluttered and Ponderous Play

By WARD MOREHOUSE

ELLIOTT NUGENT goes back to the year of 1919 and the idealism of Woodrow Wilson for the subject matter of his new play, "A Place of Our Own," a cumbersome

and lifeless piece put on last evening at the Royale. John Golden makes the presentation, in association with the author and Robert Montgomery.

Mr. Nugent's play is one of comment, and certainly one of purpose, and it is his warning that the American folly of isolationism, in our rejection of the League of Nations, must not be repeated in present times. He combines his plea for broad thinking in world affairs with a domestic triangle situation and "A Place of Our Own" becomes jumbled and contrived. It really has a little of everything and none of it is good enough.

The locale is the town of Calais, Ohio. Mr. Nugent presents a story of conflict between a young Army captain, filled with idealism on his return from the first world war, and his reactionary and aggressive father-in-law, an industrial leader in the community. The industrialist is very possessive about his daughter (such fathers have been coming along pretty regularly lately) and to keep the couple in his house and in Calais he makes the son-in-law a gift of the local newspaper. Young David Monroe proceeds to run it in vigorous pro-Wilson style, but when father-in-law turns a citizens' committee against him, just as it was about to go all out for the league, David becomes so upset he walks out and goes to Cleveland with another woman. He returns for a reconciliation, however, and as he and his young wife prepare to take a place of their own it is his pledge to continue his fight for Wilsonian ideas through the years.

The play goes downhill pretty steadily. It is wavering and cluttered for much of the way, and there is one melodramatic moment that of the angered father striking his daughter, which belongs to the drama of an era long before 1919.

The acting is on the routine side. John Archer, however, comes through with a straightforward performance as the young captain who becomes a crusading editor, and J. C. Nugent, that valiant trouser, is around to provide some homey, wise, and plainspoken observations. Robert Keith is cast as the father-in-law, made to seem a pompous and preposterous character. Jeanne Cagney has the role of the idealist's wife and Mercedes McCambridge is the Menace. Seth Arnold appears in another folksy role. There is a nice atmospheric living room setting by Raymond Sovey that has the look of authentic Calais, Ohio, of 1919.

Elliott Nugent, giving one of the town's best performances in "The Voice of the Turtle," just down the block, has previously shown skill in both directing and writing. And in "A Place of Our Own" he has undoubtedly sought to provide a lesson for would-be isolationists of the moment. But he has put it into a very ponderous play.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

April 3, 1945

'Place of Our Own'

Opens at Royale

By ROBERT GARLAND

FOR quite some time now Elliott Nugent has been leading a sort of theatrical double life. At the Morocco Theatre, which is in W. 45th st., he's been reading the lines supplied by John van Druten to the amoral Sgt. Bill Page in "The Voice of the Turtle."

At home, wherever home may be, he's been composing lines of his own, lines which were spoken out loud last night at the Royale, where "A Place of Our Own" had its initial Broadway showing.

Mr. Nugent, in his role of playwright has been giving considerable good sound thought to World War I and its immediate aftermath. He's been looking backward at Woodrow Wilson, the Peace Conference and the small town of Calais, Ohio, in the unhappy year 1919.

He's troubled at what he sees. He's troubled at what's going on inside and outside Charles Reddy's living room from early Spring until late Autumn, 26 years ago. He's troubled and afraid.

He's afraid that, with World War II drawing to an end, the same sort of thing is going to happen inside and outside the same sort of living rooms up, down and across our land. He doesn't want it to happen. So he's written a play to get it off his mind.

That play is last night's "A Place of Our Own," brought to the boards by John Golden in association with Robert Montgomery and Mr. Nugent.

Sticks to Text

When you get right down to it, "A Place of Our Own" is as much of a preachment as it is a play. It even has a text, George Santayana's widely quoted "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." Elliott Nugent, as playwright, remembers well the past.

Remembering it, he fears it just as I have said. He fears the return of the isolationists, the back-to-normal business men, the smug reactionaries that follow any World War well won.

So he shows you Charles Reddy, isolationist, back-to-normal business man, smug reactionary. He shows you Charles Reddy in his home, surrounded by his family, his prejudices and his short-sightedness. He shows you Charles Reddy, American, of Calais, Ohio.

It's not a pretty picture. It isn't meant to be. But, as a portrait of a stand-patter, it's all too uncomfortably true and life-like. In his role of playwright, Elliott Nugent knows his Charles Reddy.

So do you. So do I. And so do the members of Charles Reddy's family there in Calais, Ohio. His son-in-law, home from the war. His daughter, who loves her veteran husband. His father, who sees through him as if he were a pane of glass. His secretary, too.

At the Royale, Charles Reddy is hurtful to them all. And to his town, his State, his country and their future. All Charles Reddys are.

Keith Fias Arter

As the hurtful Mr. Reddy, Robert Keith gives a thought-out and thoroughly unlikable performance. His small town anti-Wilsonian is what the playwright ordered. In speech, gesture and a really remarkable make-up, Mr. Keith's is brilliant make-believe.

This "A Place of Our Own" is the sixth John Golden production in which Bob Keith has so far appeared. Previous ones have been "Lightnin'," "Three Wise Men," "Thank-U," "Chicken Feed" and "Seventh Heaven."

John Archer, as the homecoming David Monroe, renews the excellent impression he made only the other day in Jed Harris' arresting but, I regret to remember, definitely unsuccessful "One Man Show." A rising young he, out of Hollywood and Pasadena.

Jeanne Cagney, Jimmie's not-so-little sister,

is back on Broadway for the third time as Nancy Monroe, kin to John Archer's David. She has been to act, too. But not so well as Brother Jimmie.

There's a likely looking newcomer called Mercedes McCambridge, who reached the Royale by way of amateur theatricals and radio. And Playwright Nugent's father, the justly celebrated J. C. is on hand as Grandpa Sam, one of the Reddy household's funnier No men.

Against a belligerently believable background by Raymond Bovey, "A Place of Our Own" is timely, thoughtful and, I fear, a little on the languid side.

NEW YORK TIMES

April 3, 1945

Eviction Notice

By LEWIS NICHOLS

THE Nugents form a closely knit and very active family. They write plays for one another, direct themselves, produce, collaborate. Recently Elliott has had a job of sorts in "The Voice of the Turtle," but J. C. for a brief moment has not been working. With a little time on his hands in the morning and between matinees, Elliott fixed that situation by writing "A Place of Our Own," which went on last night at the Golden. In it, J. C. is dryly amusing, for the son has treated the father well, but the Nugent you can see on the stage is, on this occasion, the better Nugent of the two. The play itself is on the plodding side, mechanical and forced and sometimes even silly. As director, Elliott has not rescued it, and the acting on the whole does not help. Set down "A Place of Our Own" as Junior Nugent stumbling.

The play is in two divisions. One is an honest effort to discuss Woodrow Wilson and the League, with its obvious inference about today. The other is that shop-worn saga of the young man and the rich father-in-law. Back from the first World War has come David Monroe, who has ideas of working on a Cleveland newspaper. Wanting to hold his daughter as housekeeper, his father-in-law presents David and bride with the local sheet. It doesn't work out, though, for Charles Reddy is anti-Wilson, anti-progress, anti-labor. David stands parental interference for a time and then lights out for The Plain Dealer. He does not travel alone, however, for his cousin, Mary, is with him and a flock of detectives are just behind. Mr. Nugent drops the League in favor of worrying over that domestic matter, and any pretence to sense the play had before vanishes completely.

J. C. shines like a good deed: in fact J. C. is a good deed practically anywhere — and especially here. His son has given him the evening's best lines, and when he is on the stage the play stirs fitfully in the direction of life. He is not enough on the stage. Robert Keith works on the father-in-law as though he were in real-time melodrama — which, as a matter of fact, "A Place of Our Own" does sometimes resemble. Jeanne Cagney is the young wife and John Archer is the newspaper man who will find freedom at all costs, in Cleveland. Mercedes McCambridge is cousin Mary and is nice to look at; Seth Arnold, Toni Favor and others have minor parts. A period piece, the play's costumes, by Lucinda Ballard, are of 1919.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM

April 3, 1945

Feeble Words On a Big Theme

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

THE best thing I can say about "A Place of Our Own" is the worst thing you can say about anything: It means well. As propaganda it is hopelessly ineffective, and as playwriting it is hopelessly dull. A man of good will, Elliott Nugent set out to dramatize the mistakes made after the last war, presumably that they may not be repeated after this one. The same motive has already inspired *Time to Come* on the stage and *Witness* on the screen; but Mr. Nugent has been content to use a small

ordinary people rather than historical personages. He has plied a Wilsonian newspaperman against his rich, reactionary father-in-law, and let the father-in-law, through his greater influence, decide the issue in Calais, Ohio — as bigger men of the same stripe, through their greater influence, decided the issue throughout the Nation.

"A Place of Our Own" gets absolutely nowhere as pamphleteering because it is all commonplace and cut-and-dried, wholly without force, utterly without eloquence. What is worse, having set forth the issue and found no way to dramatize it, Mr. Nugent completely abandons his theme halfway through the play and puffs on by having the father-in-law try to destroy the young couple's marriage. The newspaperman goes away mad, gets involved with another girl, comes back glad, is reunited with his wife — and that's that.

"A Place of Our Own" gets absolutely nowhere as a play about people either, because they aren't people, because their talk is forced and feeble and their behavior altogether contrived. Himself one of the best of actors, Mr. Nugent has staged his play with a minimum of good acting. Only his father proves any real help: as a sharp-tongued old man with the only good remarks in the play, J. C. Nugent turns in an entertaining performance. John Archer is fairly competent as the newspaperman; virtually all the others do as little for their lines as their lines do for them.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE

April 3, 1945

Just Misses the Boat

By OTIS L. GUERNSEY JR.

THE new Elliott Nugent script wavers uncertainly between domestic upheaval and political allegory. Its people are inhabitants of Calais, Ohio, in the year when Woodrow Wilson was pleading for the League of Nations, and at first the play concentrates on a fight to put the small-town voters behind his ideology. But "A Place of Our Own" goes off at a tangent with the marital problems of a young newspaper writer living with his bride's family. With its strength divided between the two halves of the plot, the script fails to make dramatic capital out of either one.

Mr. Nugent has based "A Place of Our Own" on an admirable intent. It was his purpose to clarify the post-war problems of 1945 by examining the failure of post-war plans in 1919. His subject is a young veteran who believes in Wilson and is running a paper presented to him by his reactionary father-in-law, in whose home he lives. He plots with representative vote-getters to influence a vote in the Senate; and when his father-in-law barges in on the conspiracy and uses subtle anti-British propaganda to ruin the youngster's scheme, the play develops its greatest force. When the play has the newspaper man leaving the home in anger and then returning time after time to try to make it up with his wife over the dotting father's protests, "A Place of Our Own" becomes just another examination of in-law troubles.

Robert Keith appears as the father-in-law, the factory executive who wants both Wilson and his daughter to play the game his way. Both his characterization and the way it has been conceived by the author are good outlining of a wrong-thinking American; but his opponent is not as formidable as he. John Archer as the newspaper man has few striking arguments in favor of international democracy, and so the conflict is not as sharp as it should be. J. C. Nugent is charming as a caustic old grandfather who is on the young man's side, but neither his performance nor the amusing lines written for him by his son can keep this play on its feet.

The distaff side, including Jeanne Cagney, Toni Favor and Mercedes McCambridge, is handicapped in the domestic difficulties, involving a misunderstanding between the newspaper man and his wife prolonged past its logical ending by contrived elements of motivation. Mr. Nugent's direction doesn't always

"A Place of Our Own"—continued

keep his action ready to cover the weaknesses of situation. The curtain speech tells the audience that the father-in-law wasn't really a villain, but his selfishness was more dangerous than villainy; the play could have profited by dramatizing rather than stating, this thought. One only wishes that the construction of "A Place of Our Own" had stuck to that gun and exploded into a political object lesson.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
April 2, 1945

"A Place of Our Own" Has Timely Ideas But Is a Disappointing Play

By JOHN CHAPMAN

IN "A Place of Our Own" Elliott Nugent has written a piece about the postwar U. S. of 1919 and has sought to make it timely for now. In this he has succeeded gratifyingly well, but, unhappily, his success at making "A Place of Our Own" an engrossing play is not too great.

Mr. Nugent has one of the best professional talents in the theatre. He can write clearly and he can write with humor. He is a sagacious director, whether he is dealing with live actors or with movie stars. He is himself an uncommonly good actor, as any one who has seen "The Voice of the Turtle" knows.

Even putting aside a great personal affection and respect for Nugent and just considering his proved talents, it is not easy to report that his new play is disappointing. It has a good deal in its favor, including an entertaining comedy role for a very entertaining comedian, J. C. Nugent, who put his son Elliott in show business when he was a little boy. But it lacks tension and force; its discussions of idealism remain discussions—and, like all arguments that you aren't in on yourself, they are therefore academic.

A Paper to Play With

There isn't anything academic, in the sense of being scholarly and stuffy, about "A Place of Our Own." It is homey, homely and American, set in what might be the Nugent family's home town in Ohio. Here—Calais is what the place is called—returns a young veteran who, aside from doing some fighting in France, has also served under Harold Ross on the staff of Stars and Stripes. He wants to be a newspaperman.

He comes home to his bride (they had a three-day honeymoon before he went overseas) and plans to take her to Cleveland where he can get a job on the Plain Dealer. But her father, a small-town rich man, doesn't want her to leave. So as an inducement to stay he presents the young couple with the local newspaper.

The young veteran sees a chance for crusading with this paper—crusading for Woodrow Wilson, the League of Nations and the treaty. America, he says, now has a place to fill in the world of nations—a place of our own.

Dissolves into Bickering

The resulting struggle is between the eager young idealist and his father-in-law, who is horse-and-buggy reactionary and rugged individualist and an expert at sabotage. The weakness of the play seems to me to be that this struggle, which is between ideas, dissolves into bickering. It is amusing bickering, but not convincing on either side. This is too bad, for a more potent drama on the same theme would be astonishingly timely on the eve of the San Francisco world security conference.

Mr. Nugent's company is good, although two or three characters could have been dropped out of the play without being missed. John Archer as the editor, Jeanne Cagney as his wife and Robert Keith as the terrible-tempered Mr. Reactionary are engaging.

As Miss Cagney's grandfather, J. C. Nugent gets all the salty lines and gives them a delightfully salty delivery. Elliott directed, and with his business partner, Robert Montgomery, is associated with John Golden in sponsoring the production.

NEW YORK POST
April 2, 1945

"A Place of Our Own" Has A Good Idea But That's All

By WILLELLA WALDORF

ELLIOTT NUGENT, who acts a soldier in World War II in "The Voice of the Turtle," has written a play about a soldier in World War I who returns from overseas in 1919 fired with enthusiasm for the idealistic plans of Woodrow Wilson and finds short-sighted isolationism rampant on his own hearth in the person of his father-in-law, determined reader of the Chicago Tribune who lives in Calais, Ohio, and can't see a foot beyond his own front yard.

In "A Place of Our Own," produced at the Royale Theatre last night, Mr. Nugent pictures the efforts of the returned soldier to run the local newspaper (bought for him by father-in-law) and swing local support to the League of Nations, while Wilson is taking the issue directly to the people across the country. Both are fighting losing battles against the conservative reactionaries and it is Mr. Nugent's laudable purpose of course, to warn today's audience that we'll soon be up against the same old problem again, listening to the same old arguments and probably losing the same old fight. Then on to World War III.

In a program note he calls attention to a pertinent quotation from George Santayana: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

Setting down this brief outline of Mr. Nugent's idea for a play, we can get all steamed up about it. There we are living in what we all hope are the last days of World War II. What could be more important, more immediately pressing, than a play with the thesis of "A Place of Our Own"? One should leave the theatre feeling determined that it must not happen again—as one did after the opening of "In Time to Come," which dealt with Woodrow Wilson himself at the peace conference and after.

Unfortunately, while applauding Mr. Nugent's idea for a play, we find it difficult to stir up even the mildest enthusiasm for the play itself.

"A Place of Our Own" is a tepid, rather clumsy work which has very little theatrical vitality. When it does decide to go dramatic, it goes melodramatic instead, and old-school melodrama at that.

David Monroe, the returned soldier, proves to be less of a fiery crusader than a well-meaning stuffed shirt, while his father-in-law, Charles Reddy, the local mill owner, is such an obvious self-centered old rascal that even Robert Keith, who is a good actor, can't keep him from becoming one of those apologetic figures in a political cartoon labeled "Plutocrat."

Mr. Nugent's efforts to mix David's love life in with his admiration for Woodrow Wilson only proved rather silly and wound up by turning Mr. Keith into a mild Calais, Ohio, version of Edward Moulton-Barrett of "The Barretts of Wimpole Street."

And so we must regretfully put down "A Place of Our Own" as disappointing theatre, and not very potent propaganda. It was a good idea but it just doesn't come off.

"The Glass Menagerie"

Play by Tennessee Williams; staging by Eddie Dowling and Margo Jones; settings by Jo Mielziner; presented by Mr. Dowling and Louis J. Singer at the Playhouse Theatre, March 31, 1945.

NEW YORK SUN
April 2, 1945

Laurette Taylor is Magnificent in a Vivid Play, "The Glass Menagerie"

By WARD MOREHOUSE

THERE was great acting on the stage of the Playhouse Saturday night. Laurette Taylor, her talent undimmed by long months of inactivity, dug deep into the reservoir of her art and contributed to the play called "The Glass Menagerie," a performance of such sustained skill and expressive force that it must be put down as the very finest that the Broadway theater has offered during the entire season.

"The Glass Menagerie," written by Tennessee Williams, and his first play to reach New York, is fragile and poignant. It is a vivid, eerie and curiously enchanting play and it is made an eventful one by the appearance of Miss Taylor as a faded and bedraggled Southern belle from a past long receded. "The Glass Menagerie," as it is acted and presented at the drama-hungry

THE CAST

The Mother Laurette Taylor
Her Son Eddie Dowling
Her Daughter Julie Hayden
The Gentleman Caller Anthony Ross

Playhouse, is something to see, to cheer about, and to see again.

There were many in Saturday night's audience who have been watching Miss Taylor across the years. Some of those at the Playhouse premiere saw her as Peg, others have cherished memories of her as Luana and Rose Trelawny and "Auntie Annie" from "Out There." And now she returns to fascinate us all, and to bring into play the unused resources of the past few years, in the role of a nagging mother who prattles forever of her fated daughter and who is trying to provide a gentleman caller, plus security, for her shy and crippled daughter.

Miss Taylor captures a Southern accent magically, and with her mumblings and pauses, her detached, half-completed sentences, she brings Amanda Wingfield to life—Amanda who could have been the bride of a planter's son but who married a telephone man instead; Amanda uprooted and living drably in a St.

Louis alley tenement. Her daughter is the psychopathic Laura, who lives in a dream world and collects glass animals; her son, Tom, works in a warehouse, but he has poetic yearnings—and the wanderlust.

Amanda whines and scolds and coaxes and pretends. She is bitter, pitiful and ridiculous. She nags her son about going to the movies, about the way he sits at the breakfast table, and finally prods him into bringing home a friend from the warehouse to meet his sister Laura. Amanda puts on her deep-South airs and her chiffon out of the long ago and the dressed-up Laura captures a strange and evanescent beauty as Mr. O'Connor comes for supper. And as Amanda and Tom are doing the dishes Mr. O'Connor discovers Laura to be the girl he used to call Blue Roses during their high school days. He gives her a wonderful build-up talk to cure her of her sense of inferiority, and he kisses her, but he won't be calling again. No, he's already engaged to a girl he met on a moonlight steamer.

So ends Laura's hope for romance—and the play. Tom is off to his wanderings, to the moon and lesser distances, walking out as his carefree and hard drinking father did before him, and Amanda is holding Laura close in her protecting arms, frustrated but still not conceding defeat.

"The Glass Menagerie"—continued

"The Glass Menagerie" is tenuous. There is some high-down writing in it and attempts are occasionally made by Mr. Williams to be inclusive of the state of the world. It is actually more a series of scenes than it is a play, but it has imagination and extraordinary beauty, creating a mood and sustaining it for most of the way, and its values are enormously enhanced by the playing of Miss Taylor and her three associates, by the staging of Mr. Dowling and Margo Jones and by the marvelous stage design and lighting effects created by Jo Mielziner. No revolving stage has been used; the scenes "dissolve" as on the screen, and Mr. Mielziner's design reveals the interior of the tenement and the exterior, with "St. Louis Blues" forever droning from the dance hall just across the dreary alley.

Eddie Dowling doubles as Narrator and as the son Tom, and he is tremendously relaxed and believable. Julie Haydon does beautifully as the neurotic crippled girl living in a world of glass animals. Anthony Ross is the gentleman caller, Mr. O'Connor—gusty, hearty, natural, self-confident and an extrovert, and what a fine job he makes of it. Original incidental music composed by Paul Bowles is used with excellent effect.

Broadway is in the debt of Mr. Dowling and Louis J. Singer for the production of "The Glass Menagerie." It's a play that brings along a dramatist of high promise in Tennessee Williams; it brings a new hit into 48th Street and it provides a distinguished evening in the theater. And as for Laurette Taylor, one final word will do. That word is magnificent.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

April 2, 1945

Laurette Taylor Stars In 'Glass Menagerie'

By ROBERT GARLAND

MAKE no mistake about it, a very fine play and a truly great performance came night-before-last to the Playhouse. The very fine play is Tennessee Williams' "The Glass Menagerie." The truly great performance is that of Laurette Taylor as The Mother, its most important character. In all her distinguished on-stage days, Miss Taylor has reached no greater histrionic heights than this.

Eddie Dowling, in association with a newcomer to the theatre whose name is Louis Singer, has given "The Glass Menagerie" a fresh and remarkably effective production.

Supporting Laurette Taylor are Mr. Dowling himself, the lovely Julie Haydon, the fitted Anthony Ross. Complementary music has been composed by Paul Bowles. The direction is Mr. Dowling's, with the assistance of Margo Jones. Jo Mielziner has gone out of the way to supply a setting which, with the use of scrim, lights and imagination, is as fluid as a motion picture background.

With all these things in mind, especially the deeply touching performance of the Pag-*U* My Heart of yesteryear, the Mrs. Midget of yesterday, and The Mother of today—

Well, small wonder there were applause and cheers and bravas night-before-last in 48th st., where applause and cheers and bravas have not been heard too frequently of late. I wouldn't be surprised if "The Glass Menagerie" were the outstanding production of the waning season of 1944-45, running off with the Pulitzer and the Drama Critics' prizes.

Here and now, I cast my votes for Tennessee Williams, playwright, and Laurette Taylor player.

Fallen Grandeur

There's a little doubt that Tennessee Williams is a playwright to be reckoned with in the current theatre. Not only where night-before-last's "The Glass Menagerie" is concerned, but also when his locally unproduced "You Touched Me" is taken into consideration. He writes deftly and well. And, which is more important, he has something definite to say and knows how to say it definitely.

Basically, "The Glass Menagerie" tells the simplest of stories. There are The Mother, an erstwhile Southern belle; Her Daughter, an unhappy moonlike cripple, and Her Son, a dreamer.

The Mother might well be known as Fallon Grandeur. She lives in her glamorous past,

scarcely putting up with her far-from-glamorous present. Whiney and moody, frustrated and frowy, she irks herself and everyone with whom she comes in contact. At the Playhouse, these are Her Daughter, Her Son and The Gentleman Caller who shows up fleetingly in their St. Louis alley.

Yet, she possesses the power to dominate. It is a domination from which, I gather, Her Son finally escapes, but which is destined to hold and crush Her Daughter until the day she dies.

That's all there is, there isn't any more. Save for the fact that Her Son brings The Gentleman Caller home one day for dinner. He turns out to be the boy Her Daughter has admired, even loved, at school. He also turns out to be engaged to be married. In one of the most amazing love scenes ever written, he tells The Mother's heart-broken offspring all about it. Then, happily, he goes away forever.

And the broken-hearted daughter is left alone with "the menagerie" which is her gleaming refuge.

Head Held High

As, a while back, I more than hinted from Chicago, using the words of Ashton Stevens as I did so, the acting of "The Glass Menagerie" is superlative. Although she doesn't like to be compared with Eleanor Duse, because Eleanor Duse isn't alive to defend herself, Laurette Taylor's projection of The Mother is, nevertheless, Duse-like in the poignancy if its serio-comic detail.

Watching her performance for a second time, Miss Taylor makes her points, rounds out her characterization, by not seeming to make her points or round out her characterization at all. He who would try to pick out Eddie Dowling, Julie Haydon or Anthony Ross above the other, each in his own particular performance, is a "pin-point critic" indeed. Each, after three months' playing, is practically perfection. And the team-work of the entire quartette is something to see. To see again, and cherish. This is the showshop with its feet on the ground and its head held high.

Eddie Dowling as Her Son, who is also the narrator, once more proves himself to be a sensitive and beguiling actor, just as he did in "The Time of Your Life" and "Here Come the Clowns."

Julie Haydon, as Her Daughter, is tremendously touching as the moonlike cripple. Never maudlin, never mawkish, always toughly tender, this is the best performance of her career. And Anthony Ross is right as a trivet as The Gentleman Caller. Having seen him, Ed never have him otherwise. It's a play-going privilege to see these four fine players cooperating at the Playhouse.

The craftsmanship—the playwriting, which is memorable; the playacting, which is flawless; and the production, which is inimitable—makes of "The Glass Menagerie" a masterpiece of make-believe.

NEW YORK TIMES

April 2, 1945

'The Glass Menagerie'

By LEWIS NICHOLS

THE theatre opened its Easter basket the night before and found it a particularly rich one. Preceded by warm and tender reports from Chicago, "The Glass Menagerie" opened at the Playhouse on Saturday, and immediately it was clear that for once the advance notes were not in error. Tennessee Williams' simple play forms the framework for some of the finest acting to be seen in many a day. "Memorable" is an overworked word, but that is the only one to describe Laurette Taylor's performance. March left the theatre like a lioness.

Miss Taylor's picture of a blowsy, impoverished woman who is living on memories of a flower-scented Southern past is completely perfect. It combines qualities of humor and human understanding. The Mother of the play is an amusing figure and a pathetic one. Aged, with two children, living in an apartment off an alley in St. Louis, she recalls her past glories, her seventeen suitors, the old and better life. She is a bit of a scold, a bit of a snob; her fiery hair worn threadbare, but she has kept it for occasions of state, Miss Taylor

makes her a person known by any other name to everyone in her audience. That is art.

In the story the Mother is trying to do the best she can for her children. The son works in a warehouse, although he wants to go to far places. The daughter, a cripple, never has been able to finish school. She is shy, she spends her time collecting glass animals—the title comes from this—and playing old phonograph records. The Mother thinks it is time she is getting married, but there has never been a gentleman caller at the house. Finally the son brings home another man from the warehouse and out comes the fiery and the heavy if bent candlestick. Even the Gentleman Caller falls. He is engaged to another girl.

Mr. Williams' play is not all of the same caliber. A strict perfectionist could easily find a good many flaws. There are some unconnected odds and ends which have little to do with the story: Snatches of talk about the war, bits of psychology, occasional moments of rather flowery writing. But Mr. Williams has a real ear for faintly sardonic dialogues, unexpected phrases and an affection for his characters. Miss Taylor takes these many good passages and makes them sing. She plays softly and part of the time seems to be mumbling—a mumble that can be heard at the top of the gallery. Her accents, like the author's phrases, are unexpected; her gestures are vague and fluttery. There is no doubt she was a Southern belle; there is no doubt she is a great actress.

Eddie Dowling, who is co-producer, and, with Margo Jones, co-director, has the double job of narrator and the player of The Son. The narration is like that of "Our Town" and "I Remember Mama" and it probably is not essential to "The Glass Menagerie." In the play itself Mr. Dowling gives his quiet, easy performance. Julie Haydon, very ethereal and slight, is good as the daughter, as is Anthony Ross as the Gentleman Caller. The Caller had been the hero in high school, but he, too, had been unsuccessful. Jo Mielziner's setting fits the play, as does Paul Bowles' music. In fact, everything fits. "The Glass Menagerie," like spring, is a pleasure to have in the neighborhood.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM

April 2, 1945

A Triumph for Miss Taylor

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

AFTER creating a minor furor in Chicago, "The Glass Menagerie" finally reached Broadway Saturday night. Here, too, it should create something of a stir. As a play, I think there is a great deal wrong with it. But I recommend it without qualms, because it makes interesting and sometimes absorbing theater, and because Laurette Taylor is giving in it one of the most remarkable and fascinating performances in many seasons. She has always been one of the few really distinguished actresses that we have; she has probably never offered more convincing proof of her distinction.

The play which she dominates and enlarges is in essence a fairly simple portrait of a family, though in effect rather a pastiche of dramatic styles. Miss Taylor plays the mother of the family—a Southern woman in late middle age who has come way down in the world, been deserted by her husband and been left with rankling memories of a much-courted, magnolia-petaled youth. Her son is a lackadaisical dreamer, fond of the bottle and fretting against his home life; her daughter Laura is a shy, painfully withdrawn cripple. The burning desire of the mother's broken-down life is somehow to get Laura married, and she is forever plaguing the son to bring "gentlemen callers" to the house. At length the son brings one—to a dinner full of Alice-Adamah mishaps and desperate gales, and an after-dinner session with Laura from which the caller escapes as soon as he decently can.

Miss Taylor's acting aside, there is enough that is human, touching, desolate and bitterly comic about this family picture to keep one steadily interested. Moreover, Mr. Williams

"The Glass Menagerie"—continued

has told much of his story in telltale little scenes that can be far more effective than conventional "big" ones; he is capable, when he remains relatively straightforward, of very good dialogue; and far from sentimentalizing the mother, he has shown up all her nagging, her pretences, her small anobberies, her Southern foolishness.

So far as this is true, *The Glass Menagerie* is unbacked, unshakable theater. But Mr. Williams has fancied things up in other ways, has rather jumbled his technique and forced his tone. Eddie Dowling commutes between being the son in the play and a narrator who stands outside it: the second role seems to me both pretty otiose and pretty arty. To be sure, Mr. Dowling acts as commentator because the play is conceived as a "memory"; and it is further projected as a memory by much use of atmosphere music and dim lights. All this may make, here and there, for unusual theater; but beyond the fact that Mr. Williams isn't really master of his rather showy (and deservedly) devices, I think he has asked oddity to do work that simple artistry can do far better. If *The Glass Menagerie* aims (rightly in my opinion) at something different from straight realism, at becoming a kind of mood play, then the mood and tone must be bagotten from within it, not built up all around it. I have no desire to see anybody writing like anybody else; but instead of tinkling at various little Sarcanyesque, Barrie-esque, Wilder-esque whatnots, Mr. Williams might at least have found suggestive the whole method of Chekhov. For in its mingled pathos and comedy, its mingled naturalistic detail and gauzy atmosphere, its preoccupation with "memory," its tissue of forlorn hopes and backward looks and languishing self-pities, *The Glass Menagerie* is more than just a little Chekhovian. But Chekhov worked from within, as Mr. Williams does not; and successfully on more than one level, as Mr. Williams does not quite; and in such a way that his comedy and pathos coalesced where Mr. Williams'—except where Miss Taylor makes them blend—emerge separately.

If Miss Taylor's Southerner is not quite a great characterization, it is because the materials do not exist for one. But hers is at least a great performance, which out of many small bits contrives a wonderful stage portrait. She nags, she flutters, she flatters, she coaxes, she pouts, she fails to understand, she understands all too well—all this revealed, most of the time, in vague little movements and half-mumbled words, small changes of pace, faint shifts of emphasis, little rushes of energy and masterfulness, quiet droopings of spirit. It is so fascinating as acting that it hardly needs to be (though it generally is) convincing as portrayal. It represents a personal style, but it is never just that mark of lesser actresses—"personality." It is acting.

Mr. Dowling always has a quiet ease on the stage, and he has it here; but in neither of his roles does he seem to me quite satisfactory. Julie Haydon gets the shy, scared side of Laura, but little of the locked-up intensity that the role seems to suggest. As the Gentleman Caller, Anthony Ross hasn't an easy role to handle, but on the whole does very well with it. Paul Bowler's music is agreeable, and Jo Mielziner's set and lighting do most effectively what they are asked to do.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
April 2, 1945

The Theater at Its Best

By OTIS L. GUERNSEY JR.

BEFORE the action of "The Glass Menagerie" begins, one of the characters informs the audience that nothing of importance is going to happen in the play. This narrator explains that the scenes are his own recollections of his family life in a St. Louis tenement a few years back; that there will be only four characters, and that the only event will be the arrival of a "gentleman caller" for dinner in the second act. The narrator does not understate his case; this is the whole range of the story. But these four characters, re-

vealed by a top-notch cast in an extraordinarily sensitive script by Tennessee Williams, come together for passages of sheer theatrical brilliance at the Playhouse.

The lack of action in "The Glass Menagerie" is a bit baffling at first, but it becomes of no consequence as soon as one gets to know the family. Their life is brought onto the stage in a dreamy, informal manner suited to reminiscences, and though the script describes a pathetic situation, it is always underlined with humor. The mother is a faded southern belle who, deserted by her husband, cherishes her two children to the point of tyranny; the son is a frustrated poet and adventurer who works in a warehouse to support the family, and the daughter is crippled and shy. Their high comedy traces one of the mother's fruitless attempts to get security and a husband for her daughter.

The mother is the pivotal character, and Laurette Taylor's interpretation of the role is an acting triumph. She is a very real person, which implies that Miss Taylor must portray a wide variety of human qualities. She has the pride of the fallen when she dons an evening dress out of an old trunk to entertain her daughter's first "gentleman caller" or when she describes her popularity at a cotillion long ago. She is grimly determined when she manipulates her daughter's meeting with the caller, but she can be amusingly vague and old-worldish as she patters about the apartment or tells her children to eat slowly. She is downright hateful and stubborn when she clashes with her son, criticizing him and making him want to leave the home for good and all, as his father did. With the author's subtle shadings and Miss Taylor to reflect them, the role is a veritable kaleidoscope of human nature.

Miss Taylor has been given first-rate assistance from every quarter. Eddie Dowling is the son, the narrator who is remembering the family scene and he radiates the wise good humor of the script. He is the breadwinner who would rather be sailing to far-off countries, the dutiful son who cannot stand his mother's early morning shout of "rise and shine," who "goes to the movies" every night to get tight. Anthony Ross is the "gentleman caller," the big, good-natured Irishman who comes to dinner and tries to help the sister get over her inferiority complex. Mr. Ross's performance as this homely, gum-chewing philosopher ranks among the best of the season. Julie Haydon is the shrinking violet of a girl who plays with her collection of glass animals all day and cannot bear to mix with people.

The Williams script is so full of gentle hints at atmosphere and character that it cannot be fully described in any space shorter than the play itself. The framework defies the conventions of play-writing; the author has simplified his drama to a searching, but almost always loving, examination of four ordinary people in hard times, giving it body by packing it with both visual and spoken commentary on this complicated business of living. The direction by Mr. Dowling and Margo Jones maintains a generally smooth flow for the ideas, and the production is backed by an excellent back-alley set designed by Jo Mielziner. Even in the hit-laden season of 1944-'45 "The Glass Menagerie" is a newcomer to be hailed with joy and admiration from end to end of Broadway.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
April 2, 1945

"Glass Menagerie" is Enchanting Play, Truly Hypnotic Theatre

By JOHN CHAPMAN

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS' "The Glass Menagerie" is an enchanting play. Hardly anything happens in it and it is as quiet as quiet can be—yet, when one leaves the Playhouse and meets reality on the 48th St. sidewalk, one realizes that some kind of hypnotism has been at work.

It is the hypnotism of good playing by four

actors; the hypnotism of a dramatist who can show you four very unimportant, very undramatic people and make you live with them and feel for them; the hypnotism of a scene designer and a musician whose work subtly underscores each small change of mood. It is, in short, the hypnotism of the theatre when the theatre is used for its proper purpose of enchantment.

"The Glass Menagerie" came Saturday night to the Playhouse after having become a drama of note and debate in Chicago. Until Saturday night Chicago wasn't standing so well, for all it had sent us this season was "School for Brides" and "Good Night Ladies." It is now forgiven these errors and is gratefully saluted for having sent along Laurette Taylor, Eddie Dowling, Anthony Ross and Julie Haydon.

Only Tennessee Williams can tell you what his play is about, really, so I shall do no more than give a hint or two. It's about a widow and her grown son and daughter who live in a St. Louis alley about the time "My Blue Heaven" was popular.

An Endearing Passage

The widow is a slightly cracked Southern belle; the son a dreamer who clerks in a warehouse for \$65 a month; the daughter a cripple who will not face the world. (The girl's world is a photograph and a collection of glass animals—hence the title of the play.)

To dinner one night comes another fellow from the warehouse—an awkward, gum-chewing extrovert, apparently. But awkward, gum-chewing extroverts have ambitions and even souls in Mr. Williams' playbooks, and the way this character is presented—and the way he gives the cripple a spiritual lift—make one of the most endearing passages in a remarkably fine play.

Miss Taylor, in the role of the faintly blowy widow, is a joy to watch and hear. Humor and pathos are beautifully mated in her performance, and it is one of the top impersonations of the season. Miss Haydon is perfectly cast as the crippled elf with the glass menagerie, and Mr. Ross' graceless earnestness as the gentleman caller has great charm.

Dowling Double III

Mr. Dowling puts his mark upon the drama, both as an actor and as the co-director with Margo Jones. As actor, he is the son, who clerks in a warehouse, dreams of being a poet and escapes from the world by going to movies. He is also the narrator, telling the audience once in a while what happened, or what is going to happen, a little as did Frank Craven in "Our Town" and as does Joan Tetzel in "I Remember Mama."

Both as actor and as director Mr. Dowling is Mr. Dowling—a man of underplaying if ever there was one. When you see "The Glass Menagerie" be prepared to listen and not to cough, else everybody but Mr. Ross will be almost inaudible in the back of the house. But I would not have it otherwise. Any higher key might dispel the enchantment.

Jo Mielziner's setting of the St. Louis flat and alleyway is a work of fine imagination, and Paul Bowler's music helps to break one spell or weave another, as need be. The Playhouse, which has sheltered uncounted little miseries this season, may now feel certain that it has a hit.

NEW YORK POST
April 2, 1945

"The Glass Menagerie" High Point of the Season So Far

By WILLELLA WALDORF

ALTHOUGH the current theatrical season has been weighed down by a remarkable number of handsome but exceedingly ponderous musical shows, it has proved surprisingly impressive from a dramatic point of view—a state of affairs hardly to be expected during a war boom.

At least half a dozen plays of considerable quality have been introduced since last autumn. Yet we have no hesitation in saying that "The Glass Menagerie," which arrived at the Playhouse last Saturday, is the high point of the Broadway season so far. A four-character work by Tennessee Williams, it is completely fascinating theatre.

"The Glass Menagerie"—continued

Mr. Williams' play comes to New York after three months in Chicago, where it was extravagantly praised, and an over-friendly first-night audience on Saturday did its best to disturb the delicate balance of the performance by applauding too soon and too often, and giggling appreciatively but without much discrimination.

"The Glass Menagerie" is full of wonderful comedy, but it is not the sort of comedy encountered in gag-a-minute farces. Some of its most comical lines are spoken out of the deepest misery of its characters. This is a subtle play of constantly shifting mood and it is not easy for an audience benumbed by routine Broadway fare to keep up with the quicksilver darting from light into shade.

The drama, and the comedy, flow naturally out of the people involved, for "The Glass Menagerie" is almost entirely talk, and there is no plot to speak of. The author, whose efforts have hitherto been exhibited only in "little theatres" over the country, has a gift for simple, colloquial dialogue that not only makes his characters spring into life behind the dimly scrim that is raised and lowered on the Playhouse stage, but manages at the same time to achieve beauty and strength and a genuine poetic quality that is immensely stimulating to the imagination.

In a quiet, unpretentious fashion, the play speaks some profound truths. Like life itself, it is deeply touching, very funny, desperately sad.

A Perfect Cast

The direction by Eddie Dowling and Margo Jones—another product of the "little theatres"—is a smooth collaborative effort that fuses all the elements of a stagecraft into an almost perfect symphonic interpretation of the author's original conception. Mr. Mielziner's setting and lighting, Mr. Bowles' musical arrangements, serve to heighten dramatic effect without getting in the way, and the acting of the four players is so sensitively attuned to the drama that it is a privilege to sit before it.

Laurette Taylor's haunting portrait of a dilapidated Southern belle, deserted by a charming but irresponsible husband, is a performance that no lover of the theatre will dare to miss. Miss Taylor never tries to assume a really alarming Southern accent, but all of her little vagaries and Tayloresque gestures are employed with telling effect.

Julie Haydon is equally well cast as the shy, crippled daughter who plays with a glass menagerie that is forever getting broken. Miss Haydon's low, beautifully modulated voice is especially well employed in the role and her pantomime too is so persuasive that we are inclined to call this an even better performance than her memorable Brigid in "Shadow and Substance."

Mr. Dowling acts as narrator and also plays the poetic-minded son who seeks more ad-

venture than he finds working in a warehouse. He is excellent in both parts, and the company is rounded out by Anthony Ross' deeply satisfying performance as the Gentleman Caller.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
April 2, 1945

"The Glass Menagerie" An Unforgettable Play

By BURTON RASCOE

EDDIE DOWLING and Louis J. Singer brought to the Playhouse Saturday night the much-heralded play, "The Glass Menagerie," by Tennessee Williams, which not only caused the critics, when the drama was first produced in Chicago, to employ their most superlative of superlatives but also caused editorial writers to devote commendatory space to it.

They were right. I never hope to see again, in the theater, anything as perfect as Laurette Taylor's portrayal of The Mother in "The Glass Menagerie." Nor do I hope, many times, to see anything as wonderful as Anthony Ross' performance as The Gentleman Caller in this beautiful play. Here is make-believe so real it tears your heart out.

The play hurts you . . . hurts you all through. It arouses in you pity and terror. That, according to Aristotle, is what tragedy is for; it is supposed to drain you of these emotions, so you can go on living. "The Glass Menagerie" certainly does that.

Mr. Williams has put some laughs in "The Glass Menagerie," but they are laughs growing out of a situation. They are not Broadway wisecracks. When you laugh the characters would be, in real life, surprised that what they said struck you as funny. They are not trying to be funny; they are creatures caught in the most ordinary but the most terrible of tragedies—that of trying to live when they have no sensible reason for their living.

Epic Portrayal

I can't say anything adequate to Miss Taylor's creation of The Mother in "The Glass Menagerie." You can't describe a sunset.

She was there—a simple, sanely insane, horrible Mother, pathetic and terribly human and terribly real. She succeeded in destroying every vestige of hope and beauty and joy in the lives of the two people who loved her—her son and her daughter.

She had no love for anyone except herself. She was married once to a handsome young Irishman, who was charming and beguiling—

but he drank. She didn't drink. Therefore she had one up on him. Apparently she told him so many times that he was a drunkard that he drank himself to death just to get shut of her telling him that. . . . But she kept a smiling picture of him in the death-house she created for her son and daughter; and she kept tucked away a faded tulle evening gown in which she had once danced with him. She liked to remind her miserable son and her even more miserable daughter that she had once been a pretty, gay-hearted bride of a gay blade of a drinking Irishman.

A Flattery Hen

She is a slutty hen with her two soul-mishapen brood. He (Eddie Dowling) smokes too much, she tells him constantly, and he spends too much money going to motion pictures. He doesn't take care of himself, she says; the way he spends money on cigarettes and movies she doesn't know what is to become of them.

She, of course, is always sick. She is always worn out telling her son he shouldn't smoke, and telling her crippled daughter (Julie Haydon) that she should forget she is a cripple. She arranges a dinner party, where she expects to marry her daughter off; but she can't help prepare the food—she is so tired out and so busy seeing there won't be any smoking or drinking.

The daughter has been in love with The Gentleman Caller (Anthony Ross) ever since they were in high school, but now she had rather not meet him and let him see she is not physically perfect.

Story of Frustration

The story is this. A widow has used up her deceased husband's life insurance. She has kept her son under her thumb and tied him to her apron strings. But there is no Clytemnestra-complex here. She doesn't even love her son she merely keeps him under a sense of obligation and thus succeeds in destroying his will to live.

The money is running out. Mother wants to marry off the crippled daughter. She makes her son invite his best friend—a fellow war plant worker—to dinner in order to throw her daughter at the chap. But this Army reject, who is struggling to keep faith in himself and therefore boasts too much about how good he is, has already obligated himself to marry some one else. He loves the crippled girl, but there is nothing he can do about it. His moral scruples are such that he can't even kiss her the way she wants to be kissed.

There is frustration everywhere in this stark tragedy; so you are glad that, for a brief time, Miss Haydon (until they were broken by her brother's sudden senseless outbreak) had her glass animals to play with . . . they were something she could love and regard as her own.

This play is an event of the first importance.

